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# FLARR Pages #21: Retaining Teachers in Today's Educational Climate

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## **FLARR PAGES #21** (F, 2000)

The Journal of the Foreign Language  
Association of the Red River

File Under:

- Mentoring
- Burn-out
- Retention
- Public Schools

**"Retaining Teachers in Today's Educational Climate,"** by Georgine Lutz, researched by Tim Lutz

The most common problems cited by teachers are listed in the box below:

**The Problems.** When 15% of new teachers quit after one year and 50% quit after five years, it is clear why there is such a critical teacher shortage in American schools. Why this high drop out or "burn out" rate? Why are teachers experiencing anger, anxiety, restlessness, depression and even nervous break breakdown?

Burn out usually occurs in stages that develop at least twice during the first five years, after two years and after five. The first attack occurs because pre-teaching ideals fade quickly when the teacher is faced with the realities of the everyday classroom. Teachers do learn eventually how to cope, but they realize after the fifth year that coping is not the same thing as teaching. When teachers spend more and more time coping and less and less actually teaching, they begin to enjoy teaching less. This marks the onset of burn-out.

**The need for more and more teachers to staff U.S. schools is clashing with and ever-increasing teacher drop-out rate.**

### **Complaints:**

- bureaucratic red tape
- unrealistic expectations
- low pay
- lack of administrative support
- rewarding of hard work with even more work
- lack of influence over school policy
- a lack of appreciation for their work
- professional disillusionment
- imbalance between the demands and the rewards of the job
- a sense of collegial isolation

It is imperative that teachers and teachers in training be offered the support, the environment, and the continuing education they need to prevent the almost inevitable symptoms of burnout. If this is not done, American schools will be hard pressed to find the personnel needed to educate their students.

For some years now, states have begun to implement mentoring program for beginning teachers. At the University of Texas, Austin a study conducted by their Research and Development Center for Teacher Education, which is supported by the National Institute of Education, identifies several needs of teacher inductees:

- help as developing as a competent person
- mentor educators who are on site and skilled as collegial supervisors
- time for the mentor and novice to work together
- opportunities for new educators to talk with one another in a setting free of evaluation
- orientation to the school and the community
- a realistic assignment regarding the number of classes, types of classes, and the number of extracurricular activities

The levels of stress for a novice teacher in a new and demanding professional setting is generally high and few new teachers are truly prepared for the first year on the job. Mentoring programs can help alleviate this stress. When individuals are in new roles with all the attendant anxiety and dissonance, groups can support in the following ways:

- make a difference in the life of beginning teachers
- provide feedback and encouragement
- give mentors a sense of professional reward
- allow adequate time for reflection

Veteran teachers need to be celebrated for the job that they do. They need to know that their work has not gone unnoticed. Again, the majority of teachers feel that they experience no sense of achievement, that there is no sense of affiliation with colleagues or administrators, that that have no sense of control over the decisions and policies that affect them and their students.

The following steps are imperative:

-Teacher preparation courses must educate student teachers about the potential problems and issues faced by novice teachers. Such education must include an awareness of the need to say "no" to administrators and to seek out collegial and peer assistance early on during the teaching career.

-Teachers must learn to help each other by providing collegial support, peer mentoring programs, and recognition for the successes of fellow teachers.

-Teachers must strive to educate administrators regarding the need to alleviate the workloads educators are currently maintaining. Furthermore, the notion of rewarding excellent work with more burdens must be disavowed. Teachers bear some responsibility in re-educating administrators regarding the amount of work they are assigned.

-Local and state unions must strive to educate the public about the value of well-trained educational professionals. Perhaps when a large enough percentage of the public sector realizes and appreciates the professionalism and efforts of teachers, rewards such as higher pay and greater respect will follow.